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ABSTRACT

This document reports a series of conferences held during the third year of the Faculty Seminar on Youth, sponsored by the Center for Youth Development and Research. These gatherings are an interdisciplinary effort to get the whole, integrated picture of the young person and to begin to translate what is known, collectively, into what is done with youth, involving youth workers teachers, parents, or whatever role. For the first time it was thought absolutely essential that young people be brought into the monthly meetings to talk about their views of the four institutions or settings which have a major impact on them: the family, the public educational system, the labor market, and government. Two sessions were devoted to each of these areas. This dialogue is a composite conversation which brings together the highlights of eight seminars. The young people appearing at the seminars did not appear as spokesme n for any particular youth population. The views they "collected" are admittedly random and represent a small sample. However, these preliminary surveys of important aspects of youth's relationship to our social institutions and their current reactions are a significant beginning, because they raise some very basic questions. It i s held that it is clearly apparent from beginning to end, that when we speak of youths' attitudes, there are no simple generalizations that ring true. (Author/JM)

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# YOUTH
## responds to social systems

**Center for Youth Development and Research**
University of Minnesota

Seminar Series No. 2 August 1971

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## INTRODUCTION

As many of you may know, this is the third year of our Faculty Seminar on Youth. As one important arm of the CENTER FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH, these gatherings are an interdisciplinary effort to get the whole, integrated picture of the young person and to begin to translate what we know, collectively, into what we do with youth, as youth workers, teachers, parents, or in whatever role.

This year we felt it was absolutely essential to bring into our monthly meetings young people who could talk with us about their views of the four institutions or settings which have a major impact on them: the family, the public educational system, the labor market, and government. Two sessions were devoted to each of these areas. This dialogue is a composite conversation which brings together the highlights of eight seminars.

The young people appearing at the seminars did not come to us as spokesmen for any particular youth population. The views they "collected" are admittedly random and represent a small sample. However, these preliminary surveys of important aspects of youths' relationship to our social institutions and their current reactions are a significant beginning because they raise some very basic questions. It is clearly apparent from beginning to end that when we speak of youths' attitudes there are no simple generalizations that ring true.

Let me identify the participants in this dialogue for you. We are indebted to them for what they have contributed.

| | |
|---|---|
| Richard Ashmun | Department of Vocational-Technical Education, U of M |
| Brandon Becker | Student, Bloomington High School |
| Harold Belgum | Center for Youth Development and Research, U of M |
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| Gary Offenberg | Living-Learning Center, U of M |
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| James Wiebler | School of Social Work, U of M |
| T. Williams | Phyllis Wheatley Community Center |
| Steve Wold | Student, Luther Seminary |
| Patrick Wolfe | Student, U of M |
| Frank Wood | Department of Special Education, U of M |

In addition to the above participants whose comments are quoted in this monograph, persons from a variety of university departments and community agencies attended these seminars. These additional participants came from the following university units: Sociology Department, Psychology Department, Continuing Education in Social Work – General Extension Division, Department of History and Philosophy of Education, Department of Counseling and Student Personnel Psychology, Minnesota Planning and Counseling Center for Women, Student Housing Bureau, Agricultural Extension Service, Foreign Student Adviser's Office, Delinquency Control – General Extension Division, Student Health Service, General College. Community participants came from the following agencies: Youth Research Center, Inc., State Department of Correction, Junior League of Minneapolis, Urban League Street Academy. Attendance at these seminars averaged about 25 per meeting.

Most significant is the contribution of Nancy Belbas who produced this monograph from many hours of presentations and discussions.

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## THE DIALOGUE

**Konopka:** This is certainly a very exciting opportunity for me, to bring together a group of very articulate young people, associates from the community, many of whom have done extensive work with youth, and special faculty members who teach but whose professional interest also lends a certain perspective to our discussion of youth and institutions.

Of the four areas we have decided would be our focus — the family, the schools, government, and the labor market — the family is surely a logical place to begin. Not only is it common to the experience of each of us, but it has certainly been the center of much critical discussion recently. Can you tell us some of the details of your survey?

**Palmer:** Yes, of course. Five of us who are currently seminary students and who have worked with very different youth populations during the last two or three years asked almost three hundred Twin City high school students eleven basic questions about their perceptions, disappointments, and hopes for their families. All of us had some prior relationship with the young people we interviewed, whose own backgrounds ranged from very troubled or poor homes to those living in settled suburban neighborhoods with parents employed professionally. Although for the purposes of this discussion we are going to give you the general trends of the responses to our questions, we were constantly aware of how few really true generalizations can be made about youth's attitudes. The answers we got were always varied and complex. But there were certain underlying themes. The most dominant feeling was that youth had very high expectations for better communications and understanding within their family. Asked what one word described their homes, 50 percent gave negative responses — "hell," "mess," "existence." The other half was about equally divided among those who were neutral and those who gave very positive adjectives such as "great," "fun," "together," "contented," "loving," "good." The one word answers were very closely tied to feelings of tension, conflict, or feelings of openness in their families.

**Common theme is better communications**

**Stoltzfus:** In another question we asked, "What one thing would you change in your family and how?" The answers ranged from "economic status" among those

who were deprived to, again, all the aspects of communications. Even those who think of their families as being "happy" felt that there could be more togetherness if there were only more communication. If the comment was geared to one particular parent, it was most often the father's strictness or drinking or stubbornness that should be changed. Children of separated parents desired reunions or a closer unity of the existing family. However, almost all of the youth felt rather limited in bringing about any change.

**Konopka:** I think it is helpful to understand that this expectation of very close communication between parents and children is unique to this time in our culture and many other cultures. In societies which struggle for survival, there is no expectation for closeness, verbal expressions of affection. What we see now in the ideals of our youth is very western, very recent, and very much related to an affluence which allows the mental freedom to go beyond physical needs. The traditional family model is not one of people talking freely, where the individual feels accepted. The traditional family is almost strictly a regulatory unit which is concerned with the "how to's" and not personal fulfillment.

**High expectations for family is tied to affluence**

**Neubeck:** Isn't this also closely tied to the changing marriage relationship itself, which no longer exists entirely for the children but has certain qualities and expectations of its own? Couples now marry not primarily for economic security but for companionship and mutual help. It will be interesting, I think, to see the changes in the next generation or two as parents' expectations of each other change.

**Wold:** In my work with street youth in an urban area, I see a lot of evidence of what you're talking about. Among young people whose homes are troubled, broken, there is much less talk of "being accepted as an individual." I think it is very telling that these youth never complained about regulations, and, in fact, saw themselves as future parents being even stricter with their children. This is the way they know their parents care about them; rules communicate concern and love. They have a deep desire to belong and often look for surrogate parents if they have none of their own. Money or no money, they want to have somebody around when they come home at night. Another thing I've noticed is that a lot of boys in this situation want a child as quickly as possible, maybe for roots.

**Stoltzfus:** Youth in more affluent areas talked about restraints and family influence in a much different light. They mentioned withdrawal of privileges such as use of the car or hours as being a kind of discipline which most of them resented. But they also talked a great deal about parent restraints which played on their emotions – harsh looks, accusations such as "you don't appreciate anything" or "you kids know it all and don't care for anyone else" or the silent treatment.

**Communications skills are learned**

**Konopka:** It seems to me we so often talk about the fears of young people. I think we also have to take into consideration the fears of parents and these comments tell us a lot. I would hope that more could be done with parent education, with making guidance available. Parents, too, need reassurance and help in putting into perspective this terrible feeling of being responsible for everything their children do.

**Knudson:** The discussion groups organized around the Adlerian or Dreikurs' approach described in *Children: The Challenge* can really be very helpful in this regard, I believe. Adler proposes that the responsibility for the family rests with every member, which gives everyone a stake in the outcome. And he advocates that decisions be discussed and made in family councils.

**Neubeck:** Fifteen years ago F.B. Strain wrote a book, *But You Don't Understand*, which deals very explicitly with this whole problem of communication in the family, so this concern isn't brand new. Communication does exist on many levels and what I think youth are asking for is some sort of accepting communication and some explicit communication because all they are getting is "no, no." Parents and children can share impressions about life, self-expression, if they are given the tools. You are right, this model of the family as a close, intimate unit is quite different and quite new. To understand this is maybe to admit more readily that we do need to learn skills and the teaching and conditioning of language.

**Is communication between youth and family possible?**

**Seltzer:** I've sometimes wondered if young people are really chasing an illusion. Youth say that what they want is more communication and understanding, but is that even a realistic expectation? Maybe we should be giving them the reassurance that what it is they think they don't have is really not there anyway at this juncture in their lives.

**Neubeck:** No, I believe the possibility of communication is absolutely real and has a better chance in the family than even among peers. I have been teaching engaged couples a way of communicating which does encourage intimacy. We feel that if this kind of atmosphere can be instilled into a young family, then parents can begin to practice it with their children. In middle and upper class families I have seen family members talk openly about everything from the beginning of menstruation to Jesus Christ to mother's loss of a parent to the tensions dad is facing on the job. These things can be meaningfully shared.

**Palmer:** That is interesting to us because when the youth we interviewed were asked if they could talk to their parents about anything, the answer was a pretty general "no." Relationships with the opposite sex and sex in general were points of trouble. Religion was another.

**Konopka:** I once asked a young woman whom I admired very much and whose family I had known what she thought was the key to what seemed to everyone to be an extraordinarily good family. She said, very simply, that her parents never lied to her. But I also know from my own experience that it takes a great deal of skill to openly share one's value system without imposing it on others. This, surely, is another of those learned skills.

**Role of fathers in family**

**Wold:** To go back to a point you touched on earlier. There was another recurring theme in our answers, and that was the lack of a really significant role for fathers. When asked, "What was the best attribute you have gained from your family and from whom?", girls had a much easier time merely answering the question than boys did. Mothers were mentioned almost nine times out of ten as the parent who had given them the best attribute.

**Stoltzfus:** If boys did mentioned their fathers, it was usually a skill, such as playing baseball, that was the best attribute. I also asked boys I talked to when was the last time their father said or did something affectionate towards them and most of them couldn't remember. Mothers were also the parent they felt loved them the most and expressed that love. Most of the boys felt that lack of physical or verbal affection between them and their fathers was part of their becoming a man. I know

that my father and I enjoy hunting and watching sports together and we kind of mutually understand that this is our way of showing love.

**Larsen:** I want to tell you about a boy who came to stay in the residence for runaways where I work. He was a senior in high school and ran away because he said his parents didn't care about him. I called his mother and she seemed mostly worried about what people would think. Then, about a week later, the boy received a letter from his father. After he read it, he handed it to me. It said in effect that although his father had never told him before, that he wanted the boy to know that he loved him and that he had worked his entire life to provide the best he could for him. He looked at me and said he wanted to go home. That was a year ago and he's still there.

**Konopka:** When I was in Manila recently and talked with social workers there, they made the same comment. Youth were constantly running because they thought their parents didn't love them.

**Seltzer:** You see, again, the role of a caring and involved father is not one that many men understand from their own experience. In moving away from the patriarchal model to the kind of family which is more democratic, we cannot assume that these changes will be natural or easy.

**Palmer:** The whole question of how youth identifies with their parents as models came out in the question, "Would you like to marry a woman (man) like your mother (father)?" At least two-thirds of the youth said "no," and if the answer was "yes," it had to do with a parent who communicated well: "He respects my mother and is wise," "She's kind," "She's a beautiful person," "She listens to me."

**Colborn:** Perhaps I'm projecting, but I wonder about the influence of the women's liberation movement on both men and women. I think as women's consciousness is raised about their potential and their expectations of what they want in marriage, their ideas about parenthood will change a great deal. I see girls reexamining, rediscovering what it means to be a woman. A course at the University called the "Educated American Woman" was a great help to me because it brought to us women who spoke about a whole range of life styles with which

one could identify. I think we want to think beyond the models our parents have given us.

**Phillips:** I think the answers we heard to a couple of other questions bring in another perspective, too. One was that the young people questioned mentioned how little time they spend with their families and the other was that if they had to make the choice, a significant percentage would rather disappoint their parents than their friends.

**Youth has ambivalent feelings toward family**

**Konopka:** What I hear is that there is some ambivalence about this relationship to the family. That while it should be warm, open, and close, one cannot always live with intense intimacy. Perhaps the ideal is being able to come to one's parents in time of stress.

**Tucker:** Often, I think that youth want the privilege of communicating or not communicating; the opportunity but not the obligation.

**Larsen:** Maybe we have some misconceptions about what we mean by communication. To me, it does not necessarily mean constantly baring one's soul to another, but mutual respect and acceptance. This means that rather than passing judgment, I would like my parents to listen to me, maybe talk things over with me. Sometimes it's the whole thing of just being together. Most of the youth I talked to wished they had a close family, but they didn't. That's why they are trying to find a substitute family in communes.

**Gibson:** I can take off from there because a lot of the youth I talked to had taken that alternative. They have transferred to a communal setting all the ideals they had for the family — mutual respect, time to talk, sharing. You wonder what young people are dreaming of when they move away from home. There are very ambivalent reasons, I think. They would like everything to happen in their real family but for every bit of freedom they get, there is also loving pressure to keep them contained.

**Berdie:** In this idealistic picture, however, there seems to be something missing. How do you learn to cope with conflict outside the family if you never have it within? What I am saying is that I think conflict and a certain amount of tension teach us something, too.

**Larsen:** But again, you seem to be saying that because it

**Is conflict necessary?**

never has been, it never can be — that the family without conflict cannot exist. I think that's a cop-out.

**Berdie:** No, I'm saying that the most realistic person is the one who recognizes the inevitability of social conflict and knows this plays a very important part in life.

**Konopka:** But I think what is difficult for young people is to cope with conflict among those who are one's protectors.

**Lumbly:** I have friends living in a communal setting here who just got together to be helpful to each other. Everyone agrees to work together like a family. One of the members of this commune is a sixteen-year-old girl who was going to drop out of school and was very hung up on drugs. The others in the house talked her out of it. Because she trusted her friends and they understood her, they helped her out of the drug thing. I don't think either her own family or a social agency could have made the difference.

**Konopka:** What I hear, then, is that the responses to the family are varied and there is even a great variety within economic subgroups. But I also hear that the family, per se, does not embody all our ideals, that there are other significant influences on youth and that youth would like not only parents but adults in general to listen to them.

**Neubeck:** I myself advocate an outside listener for parents and children alike. I think almost everyone can find it helpful to have someone outside the family to talk to. Certainly in adolescence there is a need for a neighbor or an older friend because parents are sometimes too close; outsiders can be less defensive, less ego-involved.

**Liebenow:** And now it should be easier for the non-parent to help with decisions, to talk over reality outcomes in a less judgmental way.

**Role of non-parent**

**Phillips:** The non-parent plays an important role by giving reinforcement to the idea of what it is to be an adult and by giving another viewpoint on what is acceptable behavior. If one of the things we are concerned with is the relationship of youth to institutions such as churches and schools, perhaps educating

the adults in those institutions to the value of the non-authoritarian adult would be helpful. So many people who touch the lives of our youth seem to be almost afraid of them. They've never realized that with a little bit of patience and listening, youth would really like to take them seriously and value their friendship.

**Konopka:** If I interpret what we have been saying against the whole background of what we know about "normal adolescent behavior," what we discussed about youth's responses to questions about the family is not really surprising or unexpected. A feeling of loneliness, of separation, of thinking that adults don't understand, that they don't really communicate with the same values as youth do, is normal, healthy, and very adolescent. But when I hear that these young people really want adults to listen, that they want adults to mean something to them, then I think we have the obligation to do things differently. It seems to me that within the normal range of human relations we should think about what we are doing so that no serious alienation occurs.

**Palmer:** This is really a different picture from our stereotype of the rebellious adolescent who wants nothing more than to move out and be independent. Ernest Larsen has compiled a book of letters teenagers said they would like to write to their parents if they could. I'd like to share one letter with you. The book is called, *You Try Love, I'll Try Ajax*, and it begins this way:

> "Dear Mom,
> I have decided that you and not I are the casualty in the Battle of the Bedroom. Yes, my bedroom is a mess. Yes, it's true you don't ask me to do much. But will the war in Viet Nam end because I make my bed? With all the wonderful and terrible things happening in the world today, what does the condition of one bedroom matter? Yes, I know that before the world can be put in order each person must put his own little world in order. But dust doesn't bother my world. To put my world in order I need love, not Ajax cleaner. So, Mom, I'll make you a deal. You use a little love and I'll use a little Ajax."

**Konopka:** We have seen in this whole discussion that although the family is very important, there are many influences on youth: the political and social climate, as

this letter shows, has a bearing on how youth feels. Also, peers are very important, as are other institutions. Next to the family, school is the institution which is closest to the young person. As our society has become more complicated, many functions which formerly were the family's responsibility have been passed on to the school. As such an important part of youth's life, and as all our institutions change, education, too, is under re-examination. I am eager to hear from Terry Litecky and Pat Wolfe about how the students they surveyed looked at their schools.

**Survey on youth and education**

**Wolfe:** Terry and I surveyed two hundred high school students in several kinds of metropolitan schools, from a street academy which serves dropouts to middle class suburban grade and high schools to a more innovative combination university-city high school. Unlike those who did the family study, we did not know the students in the study personally. Tests were administered through English classes.

The goals of the study were to determine 1) whether the students' personal interests were being developed or if they were being molded by the motives of others, 2) what relationship there was to the degree of choice available or lack of choice available to the degree of student satisfaction, and, 3) what students felt was the purpose of education and what changes they would like to have brought about in order to repair any existing wrongs.

Although we could draw general trends and attitudes from the results of our questionnaire, we were also constantly reminded of the diversity of thinking among young people. However, there were two school settings which seem to exemplify the kinds of general differences which underlie student satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

**Two kinds of school settings**

At City Hill Street Academy in Minneapolis, students largely come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, families of over five members, and have parents who read very little. City Hill has fifteen to twenty-five students, ages fourteen through nineteen years, and is very skillfully geared to working with dropout students. It could be classified as a kind of "free" school, although it is accredited with the public schools. In this setting, 95 percent of the students said they liked school "a lot." They listed as reasons for being in school 1) to get a job, 2) to keep out of trouble, and, 3) to learn how to learn. They felt the purpose of school was "to learn

how to learn." Classes and the atmosphere were what they liked the most. They felt they could apply learning to everyday life and agreed that City Hill prepares them for self-directed learning. Students' comments were along the lines of "We aren't pressured to come to school. We come because we want to learn . . . it's a lot of fun." "You don't get hassled at City Hill. Teachers don't tell you what to do." "We feel free in our educational system. Everyone is on the same level."

**Litecky:** In contrast was a large, urban high school in St. Paul where students came from socio-economic backgrounds very similar to City Hill. But at this school, 95 percent of the students felt *dis*satisfied. They listed most often as the reason they were in school "to learn what society considers important." One student said, "This high school thinks its main purpose is to Americanize us, to keep our country from dividing. It evaluates you on how good a citizen you may be and what God-given abilities you have to offer. I feel it suppresses creativity and individualism." While the students like being with their peers, they disliked required classes and the bureaucracy and continually mentioned they had no sense of freedom. Over 75 percent of those interviewed felt that they were hassled by the educational system and that their thinking was being directed by others. They expressed a great deal of disappointment that this school failed to prepare its students for self-direction or development of personal interests.

**Wolfe:** City Hill Academy and the urban high school are examples of the two extremes of great satisfaction or great dissatisfaction. But in general, Terry and I were surprised by how little student dissatisfaction there was and how conspicuous was the relationship between having alternatives and some freedom to develop as an individual and the degree of satisfaction with the school. Where there was rigidity and lack of choice there was a high level of dissatisfaction.

**Seltzer:** I think what you have found corresponds beautifully to a poll taken by the *Minneapolis Tribune* of 600 high school students. They found over 2/3 of the students interviewed thought their schools were either excellent or good, almost the same percentage respected their teachers and felt understood by them, and over 98 percent said that if there were no legal or parental

requirements to attend, they would not quit school.

**Konopka:** I think your study points up something which I have always thought was very important for Americans and those outside our country to understand: namely, that there isn't a single, unified educational system in the United States. We live in a vast country with enormous differences between regions and even within parts of the same city, as your study shows.

**The American educational system**

Secondly, your study underlines that the schools are now in a period of change and re-examination. We are discovering that merely graduating 75 percent of our youth from high school is not in itself a sufficient goal.

Yet, we go on without any articulated, widely accepted philosophy or goals. The kind of system we do have exists in its present form because of many underlying influences. First, those who settled this country came primarily from countries whose educational systems were based on privilege, either of intelligence or class, whose political systems were monarchies, and whose other social institutions were patterned after this authoritarian model. Secondly, the democratic idea of education, that is, the right of everybody to an equal education, is absolutely revolutionary and until recently has meant the possibility, but not necessarily the quality, of education for all. Thirdly, the impact of Sputnik and the Conant Report was enormous. We became obsessed with whether or not we were teaching math and science as well as the Russians and academic, intellectual excellence was a great virtue. Sometimes I think we had a better school system before Sputnik. Part of the negativism we are seeing among students, I believe, is a reaction to the heavy emphasis on purely academic learning.

What I want to emphasize is that we have to decide what we would like our school system to look like in the years ahead in relation to what we want in this country. I mean this in a very practical sense. If we want to lessen competitiveness, then how do we encourage the individual to do his best? If we want to teach respect for the individual, then how do we proceed? How can we individualize education within the public setting? The kind of see-sawing back and forth between one philosophy and another isn't helping us.

**Liebenow:** It's curious to me that the most vocal critics of our educational system come from outside, not inside the schools. Many peers of those of us who are on the

**Critics of education are outside system**

faculty are the ones suggesting new goals for education. Alvin Toffler, for instance, discusses education for learning, for relating and for choosing in *Future Shock*. Educating for relating, I think, is the interesting one here. And in *Schools Without Failure*, William Glasser talks about the possibility of having a role-oriented educational system. He says that now we have a goal-oriented system — "I will find out what I will become after I finish high school or when I get my B.A." What he is suggesting is that young people should be finding themselves as they go along and that is maybe not so different from the goal of developing personal interests or encouraging self-directed study.

**Konopka:** I have the feeling more and more that the dissatisfaction of many young people, and we have evidence that it is by no means all of them, is much more in *how* things are done than in what is done; the *way* things are presented rather than content. This is quite different from the period of the Conant Report and Sputnik. And when we get into how it is done, we must talk about reaching the teacher and about changing attitudes and how people deal with each other.

**Wood:** And this is even more of a challenge if you keep in mind that the number of new teachers we are training each year drops and so we must be concerned with teachers who have been in the system for a while and may have quite a great deal invested in their own methods. The whole business of how you get people to change is a very sensitive area.

**Liebenow:** I remember all too clearly my first years of teaching. My recurring nightmare was that I would lose control of the class and what I did in the name of being well-intentioned and caring was awful. There are certainly very real changes which have to come about in the person before a rigidity in the classroom can be relaxed.

**Changing teaching methods**

**Williams:** When you talk about modular school settings, you also have problems with teachers whose own school experience has been entirely different from what they are expected to do as teachers.

**Wood:** Regarding schools and systems in transition, I think it's a major concern that teachers of different philosophies keep working together. Once the more authoritarian teacher withdraws or the more permissive

teacher resigns, the system cannot work as healthfully. The schools which seem to be succeeding are those that deal pretty directly with these kinds of problems. My experience with opening up school settings, with changing structure and offering alternatives within the system, has shown me that this is a very painful process. If we could somehow warn people about to undergo a transition that it will very likely be a period of great turmoil, of controversy, of great highs and lows in morale, times of change might be less stressful.

**Litecky:** It was interesting to us that there were quite a few students in our survey who said there was too much freedom and that they weren't ready for self-directed study. So, among the alternative settings should be a kind of appropriate response for these students.

**Williams:** I think you've raised an important question. Just how special does one have to be to take advantage of modular scheduling, for example? From my own experience I see that it isn't for everyone. The youth who seem to get the most out of it are those who have the will to discover and a kind of maturity and self-discipline.

**Tucker:** Being creative is a skill. It isn't just "doing my thing," and I think being the guide in a creative experience takes a lot of skill and understanding.

**Preparation for creativity**

**Litecky:** A lot of preparation seems to come from the family, at least in terms of how to make choices. Or, on the other side, we see how very authoritarian families sometimes find the freer school setting very threatening. This can interfere with a student's receptiveness. Also, the preparation a student gets in the primary grades certainly affects how he reacts later.

**Berdie:** The reaction of some parent groups to new school policies reflects some of the fear you mentioned. In many ways these responses should remind us that the school is just part of the socialization process and new moves do involve a better understanding by the total community.

**Konopka:** The word "alternatives" is the most significant one, it seems to me. For the teachers who are very skillful and stimulating, for the young person who can be creative and has the self-discipline and motivation to be self-directed, freedom is wonderful. But Terry and

Pat's survey is interesting because it does show that some students cannot take this freedom. There is some unanimity in 1) not wanting authoritarianism, and 2) wanting stimulation. Where there is no stimulation, there is great dissatisfaction. Stimulation can come for some in modular scheduling and for others in a more restricted, traditional setting. Not forcing or imposing one kind of alternative on a school may ease the concerns of parents, too.

**Rosenberg:** I am always skeptical of either-or-alternatives. I think the whole problem is to work out a structure which gives security *and* freedom to move. I really disregard the whole notion that we can have *either* freedom *or* structure.

**Hedin:** I wonder when we talk about alternatives, what kind of effect the burgeoning of new private, alternative schools has on the public system. Will these schools just be a kind of valve to drain off the kids who simply cannot make it in the mainstream, and who cause "trouble" to the teacher?

**Effect of new private schools**

**Hendricks:** To ask a further question along these lines, I wonder how this goal of meeting individual needs can co-exist with societal needs. How are the private schools, which are springing up so quickly, going to graduate youth who can function in society? Do parents have the right to take their children out of society in such a way?

**Knudson:** And if society pays the bill to develop individual needs, doesn't it have the right to expect that some of its needs, too, will be satisfied?

**Williams:** I feel that withdrawing from our public schools because of controversy could well destroy our public system. The human and financial resources are simply not there either at the rigid or unstructured extreme. Carried to its logical conclusion, this trend could well lead to education for the elite because the changes brought about will be only for a very few. To me education has meaning if it provides for my being better prepared as an individual on the job or in our complex society. I prefer to look to the public school system for this preparation because of its very heterogeneity and complexity.

**McFarlane:** As part of my study of youth and the world

**Youth, schools and work**

of work, I spoke with Sidney Marland, United States Commissioner of Education, who said he felt as you do, that the goal of public education should move more in the direction of preparing the individual to move outside school and hold a meaningful position in society. It isn't just the narrowly conceived private school which locks youth out from the mainstream of society. In some ways, the goal of the liberal arts education for everyone, regardless of talents and interest, the ultimate value of a college education, and the whole idea of having to be certified to be valuable on the job seems to separate youth from society just at a time in his life when he really wants responsibility, wants participation and economic independence.

**Konopka:** Now I think you are introducing a very basic question, whether schools should provide just the basic, general learning skills and enrichment one needs or should do more specific things in preparing one for work. I myself am very wary of narrowing the exposure of young people by spending a great deal of time teaching specific skills alone. For one thing, technology advances so rapidly that one could easily learn a skill which was obsolete by graduation time. Maybe you could tell us what the students you questioned wanted from their schools in the way of preparation for work.

**How interested are students in work?**

**McCollum:** Young people who thought their schools prepared them for the world of work were in the distinct minority. We questioned about 200 high school students at four different schools. They told us that the usual source of information about work, the guidance counselor, was not at all helpful to them because he was removed from both the students and from the sources of work. Most students felt their counselors were primarily concerned with the college bound and with mediating classroom problems. However, when vocational counselors were available, students found they were a reliable and useful source of information and help in obtaining employment.

**Hedin:** How are youth getting their jobs and what percentage did you find have jobs?

**McCollum:** Students generally expect to find a job on their own or through a friend. Only 2 percent of those interviewed would turn to a state agency.

**McFarlane:** I was surprised to discover the reliance

within business and industry on word-of-mouth recruitment. This really hurts the young person from a deprived family whose parents or relatives aren't employed.

**McCollum:** I think the percentage of high school students who said they were employed part-time gives an indication of how important to their feelings of self-worth working is.

**McFarlane:** Eighty percent of students interviewed at a suburban high school said they worked for an average weekly income of $35.00. These were students who said their average family income was over $14,000. At the urban school I surveyed, the employment level was around 66 percent, a little higher for girls than for boys, and the average weekly income was about $28.00.

**McCollum:** The two high schools I surveyed had very similar employment statistics. I think the importance of being prepared for work was shown again in the fact that over 2/3 of the students we questioned wanted actual class work on the world of work. A new kind of course, called distributive education, is designed to meet these needs, teaches some economics, some general skills and may include some aptitude testing. When I read in the *Minneapolis Tribune* poll recently that to600 high school students the three most attractive occupations are teaching, social work and wildlife conservation, I was reminded again how important it is going to be for youth to realistically understand the job market. Already we have a great oversupply in those areas.

**Konopka:** Can you briefly give us a picture of our economic situation?

**What are the economic realities?**

**McCollum:** This is a period in our economic history which is full of harsh realities, all of which have implications for youth employment. Asked in March, 1971, "Have you or anyone in your immediate family been laid off?", 23 percent of Minnesotans answered "yes." According to a Harris Poll, 73 percent of the people feel we are in a recession. The layoff rate for young people between the ages of 21 to 29 has gone to 31 percent and total unemployment for 18-19-year-olds is almost 17 percent; for 20-24-year-olds it is 11 percent. Because so many family heads are unemployed, unions are hostile to the idea of employing youth. Yet, at present, there are 260,000 young people in Minnesota

between the ages of 16 and 21. Over one million will reach 18 years of age between 1960 and 1975, due to the post-war birth rate rise. To complicate things further, rapid technological change causes industry to invest in new automated equipment rather than in increasingly expensive manpower, and technical training has almost inevitable obsolescence. If the three or four-day work week becomes a reality, many will hold two jobs, further limiting opportunities. There are also other, more subtle factors which affect the economy, such as a general decline in public confidence and the new trend in consumer spending which is toward buying down and away from ostentation. It isn't a comforting collection of facts.

**McFarlane:** *The Youth Resources Manual*, published by the President's Council on Youth Opportunity, does have some valuable information about where jobs will be available in the future. More and more we are going to have to take into consideration the realities of our economic situation. The report states:

**Where will the jobs be?**

> "Education leading toward a career for some kind of adult role is the only thing that makes sense in today's technological society. The simple fact is that regardless of the schools' and parents' pushing students toward college, less than 25 percent of them will receive college degrees. It is time to recognize and acknowledge that vocational and technical education is as important and valuable to any society as the college degree and to accept it as a respected alternative. It is significant that we do not have severe shortages in the cognitive fields requiring advanced college degrees. The demand is for skilled workers and technicians and service personnel — in many cases positions requiring less than four years of college."

**Konopka:** When I hear this, I once again get very worried. Does this mean that we should limit the number who can get a college education in order to insure jobs for everyone who does get a degree? This, too, would lead toward education for the privileged. To my way of thinking, we cannot afford to separate those who work with their hands from those who work with their brains.

**McFarlane:** No, I don't think we are talking about that kind of separation or limited admissions. What we are talking about are schools which provide for continuing

education, which allow the individual some mobility. I think it means learning everything one wants to know at whatever age the person is able to learn.

**Offenberg:** I think what some University students are saying is that we want to experience, we want an active, rather than a passive kind of education. This can put the mind and the hand together.

**Education through participation**

**Lumbly:** I think wanting to participate is the reason rock music is so popular. It's easy to participate in the beat. The instruments one needs are not expensive. Rock music talks about what it means to be a human being, the same way Black spirituals have for centuries. It's functional – and I think it's another kind of outlet for over-intellectualization.

**Offenberg:** Because of my frustrations with the University, I left for a quarter last year to work in a collective in Cannon, California. Twelve of us lived in two homes, half office, half for living. We published a newsletter which is distributed nationally called *Vocations for Social Change*. The paper acts as a clearinghouse for jobs, projects, all sorts of things that deal with people who work for basic, institutional change. The collective had some very loose general rules that people need to live together. As far as the publishing went, we did everything, learning simple and later more complicated tasks. The goal was to be versatile in every facet of publishing, from answering mail to cutting the stencils and operating the press.

**Guild:** I think the important thing about Gary's experience is that learning took place in the line of direct experience. He was an apprentice in the sense that he learned a process from beginning to end by doing.

**McFarlane:** This reminds me a great deal of what the educational philosopher Ivan Illich suggests as a model for "de-schooling" America. He advocates using an apprenticeship model in intellectual as well as skills learning. However we do it, I think it is important to get away from the idea that skills are valuable and reliable only if they are the result of formal schooling. Viewed from one perspective, it almost seems as if the job market depends on making skills scarce and keeping them scarce. Unpreparedness isn't always literally that because it may simply mean being uncertified.

**Cheetam:** I saw examples of what you are talking about when I visited Job Corps training camps. I saw facilities which were virtually built by the young people, all of whom were high school dropouts. With very few months training, they were able to work with bulldozers, graders, do plumbing and lay bricks. Though they obviously were not journeymen, they were certainly qualified to enter a craft. But there are certification problems and insufficient openings in vocational schools. There seems to be so much reliance on a piece of paper, as you said.

**Vocational training for the individual**

**Guild:** I think what you are talking about is a source of negativism among university students. Theodore Rosak calls it the "paternalism of expertise" in his book *The Making of a Counter Culture.* When you get a society as specialized, as technical as ours, the individual becomes beholden to the expert, whether it's the scientist, the teacher or the long-experienced middle class establishment who wants to pat us on the back and tell us the way to do everything.

**Seltzer:** It's interesting to me that while you are concerned with an overintellectualization of college education, I am concerned that vocational and technical training really doesn't do enough to enrich the life of the individual. Vocational schools often seem more geared to the needs of particular businesses or industries or military projects than to the needs of the individual. What you are saying, in a sense, and what I am concerned with is broadening the alternatives of the individual, allowing him the greatest mobility, vocationally or professionally, as well as socially and intellectually. I have felt for some time that if we geared vocational training more to the needs of the individual, that the labor market would be no worse off than it is now and that beyond that we might have people who have more hope for the future and greater expectations of moving in and out of labor situations. I don't mean that you have to be insensitive to what society needs, but I guess I would like to start with the human element first.

**Konopka:** I agree. I get very concerned about aptitude testing and directing and narrowing the vocational choice of youth who are very young and who really may not have had the exposure to know what they want.

**Tucker:** I did a survey of junior high school students on

their aspirations for the future and compared the results with the responses of high school students. I noticed a drastic change in expectations. Younger boys wanted professional sports; girls wanted jobs as stewardesses. Senior high school choices were entirely different; they were much more realistic. And I'm sure the answers would change again later.

**Aptitude testing and exposure**

**McFarlane:** At one city high school where family income was low, girls wanted to become nurses aides, beauticians and marry within five years. At the suburban school where I questioned students, the girls indicated professions or skilled jobs that require training. Maybe these two groups were tested for aptitude, but surely their exposure to what was possible played a part in the outcome of the testing.

**Ashmun:** We are developing programs here at the University for exposing the world of work in the broadest sense to elementary level children. The goal is to open up the widest variety of possibilities as early as possible in a young person's school years.

**McFarlane:** Despite the fact that corporations are primarily interested in management potential, the college graduate, the businessman and people from industry I interviewed were willing to present a general picture of their work by going out to students in the high schools. Students mentioned on their questionnaires that this is something they would like. Potential employers now see high school students at the Chamber of Commerce Career Fairs, during tours of their facilities, and reach them through institutional advertising.

**McCollum:** Another constructive step towards the students' more realistic perception of the world of work would be making available a more systematic and current analysis of job openings on a state and local level. This is done in Oklahoma and is made available to all high schools and vocational-technical schools to give them an accurate profile of the supply and demand situation in the job market. We have nothing like this here. Most of the statistics come out on a national basis and are not helpful enough for local needs.

**Belgum:** But what could be done on a federal or state level? What is desperately needed now is some public policy on youth employment. I think it is imperative

**Public policy on youth employment**

that government and the private sector come to terms with what they can do to facilitate meaningful roles for youth at a time when they want to participate and when their sheer numbers dictate that they must.

**Konopka:** Again, as we see, there are no easy solutions, no ready hands to offer any massive assistance. But I think it does help to understand the scope of the problem so that when we try to resolve these questions, our answers acknowledge the complexities. The dilemma of finding work roles for youth is once more a rather recent problem. It has only been since industrialization that youth has not had an integral place in society. In pre-industrial societies youth were needed to perform necessary tasks at home and in the field. And there were problems related to this, too.

However, there is a very new way now that older youth can be more a part of society and of public decisions. I refer, of course, to the new voting rights of eighteen-year-olds. Larry Bye, I know that you worked very hard on the state and national level for this change. Can you tell us how you assess youth's view of government?

**Youth and government**

**Bye:** I must admit, first of all, that I am more than a little skeptical about my ability to address the subject. Truthfully, I find the whole subject of youth's attitudes toward government terribly complex, if not rather muddled. To begin with, what age perimeter do we mean? Each survey I've seen sets different limits. Secondly, by "attitude" or "view" do we mean value orientations toward the American political system or specific positions on matters of public policy? Lastly, by "government" do we mean the institutions or processes, the people we call government, or the output, the laws and their enforcement? If these uncertainties are not troubling in themselves, it is discouraging to discover the lack of good, sound research on the topic. What little evidence there is on youth and government is not recent, current, thoughtful or thorough.

These misgivings aside, there are some important paradoxes in the subject. First, while I find no evidence of the massive kind of cultural revolution that Charles Reich in *The Greening of America* describes, young Americans do share some generalized opinions about issues which differ significantly from those over twenty-one. Secondly, while young Americans are reformist in nature about their views of American life, they appear to soundly reject violence and disruption as


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a tactic for bringing about social changes. There is an interesting dichotomy of attitude according to some recent surveys, between young black and white Americans on the admissability of certain disruptive tactics in the expression of dissent. Whites were far less supportive of disruption than blacks in certain instances.

**Konopka:** Do young people seem to have a consensus on some issues?

**Youth and consensus on issues**

**Bye:** Viet Nam has had an explosive impact on the thinking of young people. In every survey, youth express strong opposition, but there are wide differences in how they would display their opposition. The draft is generally viewed as unfair by huge majorities. There are other issues such as criticism of the indirect method of the electoral college system, an awareness of the inequities in the judicial system and in law enforcement.

**Seltzer:** In a survey I saw recently, policemen were singled out as the only authority figure among other categories such as teachers, clergy, parents, who were not respected by the majority of high school students interviewed. This seems to be a current mood.

**Bye:** Yes, it does. On other issues, there is widespread recognition of our hypocrisy on racial questions. The elimination of economic deprivation is a goal most young Americans seem to share. Most of the positions hold across socio-economic lines.

**Lumbly:** Yet, as a Black student, I felt very angry about the student strike over the Cambodian invasion last spring. To me it seemed very white, very middle class and very much safer than protesting the killing of Blacks in Mississippi. Why is it so much easier for students to protest an injustice taking place thousands of miles away?

**Role of leadership among youth**

**Bye:** I think people form political opinions to a large extent by responding to the attitudes expressed by leaders within their peer group. I think this is true on the war, I think it is evident in the political preferences being shown by young registrants. In a recent poll, young voters on usually Republican Long Island are going nine to one into the Democratic ranks. The leadership which presently is in power among young movements is largely very liberal. I think their influence is already a significant factor. But there is also a

considerable number of youth who call themselves independents, who have no strong attachment to either political party.

Because the young voter has not voted before, because he has never really been appealed to for his vote or has not been politically organized, he is a different political animal. I really believe his first experiences in campaigns are crucial to the kind of pattern he will follow later. We are beginning to realize that the level of participation nationally, now that the franchise has been extended, will depend on the work that goes into the mobilization for the vote. I am pessimistic about the impact of the young without a massive national effort to register and mobilize youth. In the Southern states which offered the franchise a few years ago, the turnout of the young has been disappointing. What I am saying, then, is that there are significant differences in how youth view certain issues, but whether they will participate in asserting these differences is something else.

**We perceive youth differently**

**Konopka:** I think one very important difference in youth today is the way we look at them. The way the media focuses on their activities, the way they have been included in some functions of government or the making of school policy. Society seems to perceive youth as people who have something to say, to whom one should listen. Whether or not this will affect youth's level of participation, I don't know. But it could.

**Seltzer:** A Minnesota Poll published on June 15, 1971, stated that 74 percent of people surveyed say there is a difference in youth today and 44 percent of those who said there was a difference, said that "young people are better educated, more sophisticated, have more awareness of things and are more interested in political and social issues." This certainly substantiates what you've said.

**Ross:** Another important difference is that the educational level of young people is significantly higher than it ever has been. In that sense, we do have better educated, better informed youth who are willing to speak out.

**Konopka:** Still, we have to be aware that not all young people are well-informed. I don't think this is a generalization which will hold true with lower-income

**Are youth active and well-informed?**

youth. From our work in neighborhood centers around the area, we know there is still a great deal of misunderstanding about many issues. But as I look around on campus and from what I read, there seem to be more young people involved in political and school activities and issues than ever before. That means that they have found that the structure allows them to be involved.

**Bye:** Over half of the youth surveyed by Gallup said they had participated in social action of some kind and Gallup concluded that this kind of thing was an integral part of college life today. A CBS study suggested that about 1/5 or 750,000 students identify in some way with The Movement.

**Ritter:** Three of us who are here can speak from personal experience about involvement with city government. We are students at Bloomington High School, a large suburban school in a city of 85,000. About four years ago, the city commissioned two faculty members from the University to survey youth regarding what could be done to better facilitate their needs and participation. An outcome of the report's recommendations was that youth were seated on city commissions. I was accepted as a member of one and felt that I was fully incorporated as a working participant.

**Wasserman:** As a member of the youth commission in Bloomington, I felt I was almost more than equal because youth usually outnumbered adults in attendance. Adult members looked to us for direction and wanted our ideas. We were able to set up teen centers and are now planning a youth counselling center.

**Hedin:** There was a comparative research study done on the level of participation of youth in England, France, the United States and several other European countries. The United States had the highest comparative level of participation at that time, about five years ago . . . before the vote was even a factor.

**Ross:** I would be willing to venture that political involvement is really part of our moral commitment or moral conscience, a kind of ethos running through what we call our American way of life.

**Konopka:** Still there is a high-level of frustration and a lot of talk about not being able to participate. But what

is going on here seems to me much different from what I saw in other parts of the world. On my "working sabbatical" I saw whole societies where it's not only the young but others who see no hope for any participation, so they don't even make a move towards it. They lie there, passively. Now that's beginning to change in most countries, I think. The stronger the change, the more people feel that they can at least try.

**Why are some students passive?**

**Ritter:** But walking through the halls at school everyday, it seems to me about 80 percent of the student just don't seem to care about anything. Maybe the inactive ones are more conspicuous now because of their contrast with those who are involved.

**Johnson:** I see this at the University, too. A real apathy, a seeming indifference among many students. In working with a freshman honors class on the counter-culture, I've tried to analyze this kind of unresponsiveness. One explanation which seems to fit for me is parallel to something I learned in psychology: systematic desensitization, a method of neutralizing anxiety-producing stimulii. I think television plays an important part in what has happened to many of us. We sit in front of television and watch the war while we eat dinner. Or we fall asleep in front of a horror movie or drive through a slum in an air-conditioned car. There doesn't seem to be any appropriate way of responding to things that we see out there. To me this seems to be a valid explanation of why some young people are trying new modes of involvement, new ways of responding appropriately to given situations. A stylistic way of living is good and necessary if you can't respond immediately to what is impinging on your life. But you can also get into other things, like drugs, sensitivity training, rock music, because of your need to be involved.

**Bye:** But part of the disinterest in political affairs, I think, has been because changes don't happen as quickly as people would like. I know it seems contrary to the kind of urgency many issues have, but the way to bring about change is through consistent work. This whole characterization of the happy hippy who is going to change society by smoking grass doesn't hold up because the business of changing society is a long, hard battle. It isn't just youth who have trouble realizing this either. There is a tendency among middle-aged, middle-class people, who've just become involved in politics, to be very short-term, issue-oriented. I don't put down

their interest, but I am concerned that they don't see politics as crucial and important as it ought to be. I think it's easier, sometimes, for people engaged in the struggle to survive to see the central importance of political participation.

**Ritter:** I've seen interest drop on the part of Bloomington youth as fewer and fewer apply each year for positions on city commissions.

**Konopka:** Basically, you see, the human animal is very lazy. It needs a special push, a crisis. The question is, how can we sustain interest? As long as there's a war, then one can fight it. As long as there is racism, then one can oppose it. I hope I can look forward to some of these issues being resolved, but without losing the interest of so many of the young.

**Bye:** That is what I meant when I said the young *could* constitute a potent force for social change *if* they take the opportunity, get organized, and vote. Minnesota is adding half a million new voters under 22 years of age. In other states, California, for example, the number is much higher. Youth could well be as apathetic as their parents have often been. I think beyond the voter registration drive, the appeal of the candidate will have a very important influence.

**The charismatic leader**

**Rosenberg:** This is the variable you left out in talking about the participation of people: the leadership variable. One of the things that attracts people, especially youth, is charisma. This is a situational thing which you can't plan for and over which you don't have too much control. But if on the national level there is someone who can have the charisma, then much of the passivity can be mobilized very quickly.

**Konopka:** Those of us who have lived under a charismatic leader really don't want to even hear the word again. I am very fearful when people do things just for personalities, not for issues. This is what "charisma" means to me. You follow a leader because he has a beautiful face, speaks beautifully, appeals to your emotions.

**Becker:** On a smaller scale, I think those of us who worked on Bloomington Commissions were very disturbed by how personality-oriented, rather than issue-oriented city government really is. We saw ideas adopted

not on merit but because of the people behind them and we were deeply concerned.

**Rosenberg:** If people are so much better informed today, particularly youth, do you think they would be easily led by a beautiful face? Don't you think there is charismatic good and charismatic bad?

**Konopka:** First of all, I really question whether youth are better informed. These young men are from one of the better high schools and have had a very unusual opportunity to be involved. I am only saying that I admire leaders who can reach others and get them excited about issues. But the charismatic leader sounds very dangerous to me.

**Is The Movement political?**

**Wiebler:** Larry, you said that about 750,000 young people identify with The Movement. This could be significant sociologically and politically, though it is a small numerical block in terms of our total population. Do you see it as a political movement?

**Bye:** Once again, I guess the answer is yes and no. Some people in it are very political, some not at all.

**Guild:** Perhaps in the sense that The Movement or counter culture has experienced some repression from the police and from society as a whole, it is experiencing a rise in the level of its political awareness. But, in general, I don't think of it as a political instrument.

**Johnson:** Again, I speak just for myself. But if politics is working for a long-term goal, I can't buy into it. The whole idea of long-term anything simply doesn't make sense to me. Survival and life seem too tentative. I can't think beyond now. I use the outlets of the counter culture because they feel good, not because they fit into some revolutionary plan. To me, long-term goals are an insulation against reality, mere speculations. The most we can hope for is that change will continue and possibly accelerate. We don't want to take over anything, we want to co-exist. We want to have the option of a separate life style.

**Seltzer:** Are you saying, then, that what you have must be exclusive, that is cannot be shared with others, with other age groups, people who share your frustrations with our society or who like your life style? My feeling is that ideas belong to everyone and to the extent we

allow people to choose the ideas and style which make up their way of life, we will have a viable and free society.

**Berdie:** I agree, but I think we also have the responsibility to present as many facts as possible so that people can make the best decisions. I hope that at a later time we can bring into our seminar discussions additional material with a national and international scope regarding youth and social institutions to further broaden our perspective and understanding.

**Konopka:** Yes, that would be exciting. Yet what our young people found here in talking with hundreds of young people clearly indicates that youth's attitudes toward social institutions are not monolithic. Youth emerge as people with many independent thoughts. Still, one additional thing is evident. Namely, that whatever their attitude, whether it is positive or negative, they want to actively participate in making our social institutions more genuinely concerned with the human being.

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